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U. S. Department of Agriculture

HOUSEHOLD CALENDAR

School Lunch Days Are Here Again

A radio talk by Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, and broadcast by a network of 50 associate NBC stations, Thursday, September 19, 1935.

--ooOoo--

MR. GAPEN: Welcome home, Miss Van Deman. You look as though you've had a grand vacation. As they say in the north woods, you look as though you could lick your weight in wild cats.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Yes, sir. I did have a grand time. And speaking of wild cats, I came right down through what they call the wild cat county of Maine, but I didn't meet any of these ferocious beasts.

MR. GAPEN: Probably just as well. Did you go through Aroostook County, too?

MISS VAN DEMAN: Yes, we did, and I never saw more beautiful farms in all my life.

But now to Household Calendar business. School lunches are beginning again and we are getting lots of queries.

MR. GAPEN: About hot school lunches, I hope.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Yes, our letters are coming from women who are working with the PTA or some other community group on plans for serving the youngsters a hot school lunch.

MR. GAPEN: Well, those cold sandwiches I ate as a boy, from an icy cold lunch pail, still lie like stones in my memory. I don't treasure any illusions about those being the good old school lunch days.

MISS VAN DEMAN: I don't either. But now, a rural community is behind the times if it doesn't have some plan for serving the youngsters at least one hot dish at noon. You just ought to read the reports of the nutrition specialists of the Extension Service on this school lunch business. I was looking through a pile of them the other day. Every State in the Union was represented. Even Alaska had a story to tell about using skim milk powder in hot lunches for the native children.

As I went along I jotted down some of the points that impressed me the most. I liked the way Miss Grace Armstrong, of the University of Illinois at Urbana, summed up results under these 10 headlines:

Children are bringing better balanced and prepared lunches. - - - They spend more time eating lunches. - - - They enjoy the lunch hour more. - - - Children under weight have gained. - - - They have more resistance to disease. - - - School attendance is better. - - - Mothers say lunches are easier and cheaper to prepare. - - - The school lunch project teaches citizenship, responsibility, initiative, honesty, courtesy, manners, cleanliness. - - - Hardly any children eat between meals. - - - Children are doing better school work; their grades are better.

(over)

MR. GAPEN: That's getting down to brass tacks all right. I suppose different States have different ways of organizing this work.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Oh, yes. And hardly any two communities go at it just the same way. Sometimes the county nurse may start the ball rolling when she weighs and measures the youngsters at the beginning of school. Sometimes a woman leader gets other people in the community to help her stock a school pantry with home canned and home grown foods.

I read about one PTA president out in Ohio who went much further than that. She asked the president of the school board for kitchen space and money to pay a cook. One man on the board promptly objected. He said he didn't have a hot lunch when he was a boy, and he believed nowadays children were just getting too pampered for any use.

Madam PTA President came right back. She asked him what he fed his chickens every noon -- he raised poultry on a big scale, she happened to know. She asked him if he didn't give his chickens a warm mash at noon in freezing weather. He admitted he did, and he got the point. So the school board agreed to give space for a school lunch kitchen and pay a cook. And at the end of the year everybody was so pleased with what the school lunch had accomplished that the board built in cupboards and bought modern equipment, and assumed full financial responsibility for the whole project.

MR. GAPEN: That's almost too good to be true, Miss Van Deman.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Yes, it certainly is, but it just shows what can be done.

MR. GAPEN: I suppose every State College of Agriculture has some printed or mimeographed material on school lunches to help a local group.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Yes, that's right. Any woman interested in a school lunch project should contact her State extension service first.

MR. GAPEN: And has the Bureau of Home Economics any bulletins to send?

MISS VAN DEMAN: Yes, we have a mimeographed circular called "School lunches, with recipes to serve 50 children". We are glad to send it to a teacher or to the leader of a lunch project.

And here's a suggestion I'd like to make on my own. It's an idea for converting those cold sandwiches you complained of, Mr. Gapen, into hot toasted, appetizing sandwiches. Nowadays, there is electricity in many rural school houses, even if there are no stoves for cooking. So why not let the youngsters club together and get an electric grill for the school, so they can heat up the sandwiches they bring from home? I'm not strong for a sandwich lunch but that would give it more appetite appeal anyway. Also it might be the opening wedge toward an organized school lunch program.

MR. GAPEN: It might indeed, Miss Van Deman. Thank you, and we'll be looking for your Household Calendar again next week.

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